



*Dear Özgehan,*

*What on earth happened in Turkey last Sunday?*



The results of the repeat elections that took place in Turkey on 1st of November were completely unexpected for almost the entire population, including the polling institutes and the clear winners, the AKP. With 317 seats out of 550, AKP will comfortably form a single party government.

Now the main question is: how could a party increase its votes almost by 9 % points in only five months?

Under normal circumstances this would be considered short of a political miracle. However, between June and November elections, Turkey did not go through normal circumstances.

Over the last five months, almost 500 people lost their lives in five months, creating a wave of fear and concern. The armed terrorist Kurdish group, PKK, relaunched its wave of attacks against Turkish security forces, to which the state responded heavily, causing shut-downs of conflict zone towns with predominantly Kurdish populations such as Cizre for entire days. And on 10 October, a terrorist attack carried out by suicide bombers in the heart of Ankara claimed 102 lives, the highest toll ever in Turkish history. Following almost two decades of calm and peace, many felt like Turkey was sliding back to the horrible days of terror of early 1990s.

The failing coalition talks and increased polarization also pushed Turkish economy into crisis. Highly dependent on imports, including oil and gas, the economy took major blows with the Turkish lira plummeting against the dollar and reaching record lows.

As a result, the background of the elections was fear and anger. As political researcher Emre Erdogan argued in a comment, 'people vote differently when they have hope compared with voting when they are scared or furious'. In June, Turkish voters had hopes for change and improving their lives. In November, the majority were afraid to lose what they already had. This changed everything.

When the vote increase of the AKP is closely examined, it appears that the party has managed to re-mobilise two groups: the nationalist Turks and the religious Kurds. This mobilisation came at the expense of the two opposition parties; the Nationalist MHP and the Kurdish HDP. Both parties lost substantial votes in favour of the AKP compared with June. The return of religious Kurds cost HDP 25% of its seats in the parliament (down to 59 from 80). The AKP also managed to consolidate the Turkish nationalist votes, mainly from central and northern Turkey, at the expense of the nationalist MHP, who lost half of its 80 seats between June and November. The outright rejection of the MHP leadership in June to participate in coalition talks, and their refusal of the offer made by the moderate CHP to offer them the office of the Prime Minister in a possible post-June CHP-MHP coalition could also have dissuaded MHP voters.

The June elections were dominated by the issue of the presidential system, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan was very active in the campaign. For the November elections, the AKP smartly focused its campaign on stability and order, with President Erdogan keeping a lower profile this time, not providing an opportunity for the opposition to make regime change the top issue.

And now? The AKP is expected to form a government by the beginning of December. Time will tell whether they will be able to deliver the economic and political stability they promised. It is not going to be an easy task, considering the immense polarisation that dominates society, coupled with the ongoing war in Syria, about 2 million Syrian refugees in Turkey and the increasing ISIS threat. The question whether peace talks with the PKK will resume will also be crucial. Winter is coming, both literally and metaphorically, and half of the voters in Turkey visibly hope that a single-party AKP government will help them go through it.

*Take care!*

*Özgehan*

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